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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000508

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DEPT FOR AF/DAS WOODS; OVP FOR NULAND; AS WOODS; AF/S BRUCE NEULING
NSC PLS PASS TO SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE
DEPARTMENT PASS EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL ZI MDC

SUBJECT: TSVANGIRAI BOUNCING BACK: DETAILS FRAUD AND NEXT
MDC STEPS

REF: HARARE 502 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CHRISTOPHER W. DELL, REASON 1.4 b/d

Summary

¶1. (C) A more upbeat MDC Head Morgan Tsvangirai told the Ambassador late Saturday night that his contacts inside the CIO had told him the MDC had won over 90 seats in the March 31 Parliamentary elections. Tsvangirai said his next step was to go after the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and force them to explain large discrepancies in the total number of votes cast and the official results. The MDC would not, however, boycott Parliament. He told a broader group of Ambassadors the same thing Sunday morning (omitting any mention of the CIO), but added that anger was building and after five years he was not sure the MDC could prevent people taking to the streets. This, however, was what Mugabe wanted - a pretext to crush the opposition. He added that South Africa had played a "dishonest" role and that the MDC would write them off. The Ambassadors stressed that African criticism would strengthen that of Western countries and several suggested he look to the AU. The Ambassador added that in any event, the degree of fraud was such that it was hard to imagine any serious outside observer arguing for "normalizing" relations with Zimbabwe, for example by removing sanctions and resuming IFI lending. End Summary.

Private Meeting with Ambassador Dell

¶2. (C) Tsvangirai said he was calling in all MDC candidates and asking them to analyze the official results and compare them to MDC and Zimbabwe Electoral Support Systems (ZESN) data to highlight the extent of the fraud. He said a preliminary study of the results had found there were 32 (rising to 35 by Sunday) constituencies where difference between the total number of votes cast as announced by ZEC at 2 a.m. Friday morning and those ultimately certified by ZEC later in the morning was enough to change the outcome. He highlighted the Beitbridge constituency as an example, where ZEC had initially reported 32,000 voters but only 20,000 were ultimately recorded in the official results. Tsvangirai claimed his contacts in the Central Intelligence

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Organization (CIO) had told him that according to their information the MDC had in fact actually won over 90 seats.

¶3. (C) Tsvangirai said MDC was considering its options in responding to the fraud but would in any event pursue a legal challenge to the results through the electoral courts. The goal would be to force ZEC officials to explain these discrepancies, which they had so far failed to do. He said at this stage the MDC had ruled out a boycott of parliament, which ZANU-PF would simply pocket. The MDC would accept what it had won and challenge what it had lost. Tsvangirai said anger was building but that the MDC and its partners could not as yet generate the kind of numbers for street protests that would be needed to face down the military. He said Mugabe would be waiting for just such an opportunity to crush the MDC and would "come on heavy" if the MDC took to the streets. He said the party was considering organizing a stay-away. He acknowledged problems with some in civil society but said they were being resolved and that labor and the churches were supportive.

Broader Diplomatic Meeting

¶4. (C) In a Sunday morning meeting with the Ambassador and a selection of other, largely European Ambassadors, Tsvangirai reiterated that the election had been stolen and

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that the MDC had actually won over 90 seats (he did not note that this information came from the CIO). So far irregularities had been reported in the results for 35 constituencies. Tsvangirai acknowledged that the MDC had been slow to react to the fraud, but said the MDC would be issuing a statement saying they could not possibly accept the result of the elections. As he had previously told the Ambassador, his party intended to challenge the ZEC to defend the announced result totals before the newly established electoral court but would not pursue a strategy of challenging individual constituency results.

15. (C) Tsvangirai criticized the "cosmetic" changes to the electoral environment, which he said had not addressed the fundamental lack of a democratic environment in Zimbabwe. The delimitation exercise had been the most serious problem, followed by the lack of a truly independent (and empowered) independent electoral commission and a voters roll which he characterized as a "shambles." He also noted the use of the security forces to run the electoral process, use of traditional leaders to coerce rural voters to support ZANU-PF, and said that the people in resettlement areas were in fact "captive constituencies" (literally) for ZANU-PF. The MDC leader added that the ZEC had not really been in charge of any aspect of the process, which had in fact been run by the ZANU-PR bureaucracy.

Next Steps

16. (C) Tsvangirai said the Zimbabwean people were disappointed with the result since they knew how they had voted. However, he was urging them to stay the course and fight on. "Democracy is not an event, it's a process," he said. He said that after reviewing its options the party had decided to reject the results of the election and to carry on with its democratic struggle. He repeated what he had told the Ambassador that the MDC would not boycott Parliament. He called Mugabe a "stumbling block" to every effort to affect democratic change in Zimbabwe and said that Mugabe was hoping people would take to the streets so he could crush them ruthlessly and eliminate the democratic threat to his grip on power. For five years MDC had avoided the path of violence, but he was uncertain whether he could control the people's emotions anymore.

South Africa's Role; International Response

17. (C) Turning to the role of Zimbabwe's neighbors, Tsvangirai described South African president Mbeki as a

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"dishonest broker" in view of the whitewash of this process offered by the South African and SADC observer missions. He said that as a matter of principle South Africa was complicit in the electoral fraud in Zimbabwe and had gone "all out" to justify the end result "without scruples." He said that in view of this complicity, henceforth the MDC would reject any role for South Africa in any potential dialogue between MDC and ZANU-PF. On the question of future dialogue with the GOZ and ZANU-PF, Tsvangirai said the MDC would only agree to discuss a new constitution after the "fundamentals," including the recent electoral fraud, had been addressed.

18. (C) In the ensuing discussion several of the diplomats present stressed that the ability of the West to criticize the elections would be lent additional credibility if African voices were also heard. Tsvangirai and MDC Secretary General Welshman Ncube both said that while they

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planned making a round robin visit to African capitals in the coming weeks, they had little faith that any African government would dare speak out. They were thus trying to get independent voices from African civil society, churches and trade union movements to offer public criticisms. The British Ambassador stressed that the leader of the AU observer team was a Ghanaian official who was independent, courageous and concerned to protect his reputation. He urged the MDC not to give up on the AU. (N.B. In fact, the AU team followed us into Tsvangirai's residence).

19. (C) The Ambassador made the point that our ability to increase pressure on Mugabe had been helped considerably by the degree and extent of the latter's manipulation of the vote tabulation. No serious international observer could now credibly assert that this was a legitimate process and that therefore the time had come to drop sanctions on Zimbabwe and "normalize" relations. Saying that he was speaking personally and not on instructions, the Ambassador

said he found it hard to imagine, for example, that Washington would even consider supporting IMF balance of payment support to the Mugabe regime in light of this patent fraud and anti-democratic behavior. Mugabe's behavior also portrayed the attitude of a despot who ruled from a narrow base, relying on the security services and absolute control over all political processes to maintain his hold on power, and was not the attitude of a fundamentally confident democratic leader.

Comment

¶10. (C) Two things are clear from the aftermath of this election. One is that Robert Mugabe will do whatever it takes to fulfill his wishes and will only address the consequences afterwards. We underestimated the extent to which he would go in securing a two-thirds majority so that he can dictate his country's future, believing that Zimbabwe's need for assistance: food and fuel, would force him to moderate his aims. As long as Mugabe is in charge, ZANU-PF is incapable of embracing reform and democratization in Zimbabwe, no matter how modest. The second thing that is clear is that Thabo Mbeki has lost the MDC's confidence completely and cannot now play a constructive role because of his perceived bias and "complicity" in favor of one of the parties in the dispute. We will have to look elsewhere for an African voice that will speak for the disenfranchised people of Zimbabwe.

¶11. (C) As to Tsvangirai, anger at the MDC's failure to anticipate the opaque tabulation process and be ready with counter measures is growing, especially following his vacillating press conference performance on Friday morning. That said, he is probably right that mass action would not succeed without a lot of preparation and it says something for his inherent decency that he was not willing to risk people's lives -- it would be hard to see Mugabe making a similar call. It was good to see Tsvangirai upbeat and preparing himself for the struggle ahead, which he knew all along -- as did we -- was going to be long and difficult regardless of the election's results.

Dell